

The Look of Love by **theobviouschild (danielle007)**

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Summary:

When a ride with Steve Harrington goes awry, Serena wants nothing to do with him. Unfortunately for her, he's not letting her get away so easily.

1. One

Summary for the Chapter:

When a ride home from Steve Harrington goes awry, Serena wants nothing to do with him. Unfortunately for her, he isn't letting her get away so easily.

Notes for the Chapter:

All "Stranger Things" materials/characters belong to the Duffer brothers. I only own my OC.

Serena fought back tears as she stormed out of the crowded house. She cursed herself for believing that Kate wouldn't venture off with her boyfriend and that Alice wouldn't go home with some random guy. They'd promised her they wouldn't leave without making sure she got home safely. But promises had little to no value in drunken states of minds. She was gonna kill them.

Her teeth chattered as the night wind brushed past her bare arms. She scolded herself for not bringing a jacket because of her friends' arguments that a jacket would ruin her Michelle Pfeiffer "Scarface" costume. It also didn't help that the ankle strap of her heels dug into her skin and the soles of her feet were sore from rubbing against the insole, making it difficult to walk. She contemplated knocking on the doors of some the neighborhood houses and asking to use their home phones to call her mom. But the lack of the light within the houses made her think twice. For all she knew, if they bothered to wake up, they'd take one look at her and assume she was a hooker or pulling a prank and slam the door in her face or call the cops.

It also didn't help that she didn't know where she was or how to get back to her house. The rustling of trees gave her goosebumps. She eyed her surroundings as her stomach twisted and churned nervously. Suddenly, she lost her balance with the heels and fell onto the road, scraping her knees and the palm of her hands. She propped herself up and as the anger and anxiety that had been building up within her the entire night was released through the hot tears that strolled down

her face. Her body trembled as she put one hand on one side of her face and sobbed.

She had tried so hard to fit in at Hawkins. She tried so hard to be a part of place that she simply didn't feel welcomed in or belonged in. Her mother and her moved into her mother's old childhood house after her mother filed for divorce from Serena's dad. Being forced to go through her senior year at a new school was the loneliest experience. Kate and Alice, her supposed friends, treated her like a third wheel or like their little puppet they could manipulate. Outside of them, she had Jonathan Byers but that felt more like a forced friendship. Their only common ground was that their mom's were friends since forever and that they were both products of a divorced household.

This party was supposed to help her find her place. She'd saved all her babysitting money on the dress and the wig and the heels just to feel beautiful. She figured maybe if she looked good, she'd find the confidence to talk to people. But the second she walked in, her insecurities crept in and she found herself feeling alone in a crowded room. She walked around aimlessly, watching everyone else around her have fun. Kate and Alice ditched her immediately and Jonathan only acknowledged her with a nod. The final straw came when Billy Hargrove accidentally spilled his beer on her, ruining her dress. It was then she threw her cup on the ground looked for Kate or Alice only to find out from someone she'd asked that they'd left.

After wiping her runny nose with her arm, she threw off her wig and wig cap, letting her dark hair fall. Her fingers smoothed through her bangs to tame them from their current, unruly state. The sound of a car slowing down caught her attention. Her heart rate picked up at the car slowing down before coming to a complete halt beside her. She stood up off the ground and clutched her wig in her hands.

Because tonight couldn't get any worse, let's throw me possibly getting kidnapped into the mix, she thought.

The window rolled down to reveal a Steve Harrington in the driver's seat. While she was relieved it was at least somebody she recognized, she was slightly taken aback. She could have sworn she'd seen him leave the party a few minutes after accidentally spilling punch all

over Nancy Wheeler.

"Hey, Serena, right?" he asked.

She stood there, her mouth hung open but unsure of what to say. "I...yeah..."

"Steve Harrington?" he continued as he pointed a finger to himself. "Fourth period English class?"

"Yeah, I know who you are."

Steve nodded. "Do you need a ride?"

She shook her head. "I'm fine thanks."

As she turned away to continue walking, she heard the sounds of tires crunching on the streets behind her. "If you're waiting for Alice or Kate, you're wasting your time," she heard him call out to her. "They ditched not long after I did."

She looked over her shoulder at him. He had his head sticking out from the car window. "Look, it's past midnight, it's freezing, and you look like you've had a crappy night. I can't fix the crappy night but I can at least make sure you get home safe."

Serena let out a sigh and opened the passenger door. As she closed the door, she relished the in the warmth of his car. Steve reached into the glove compartment and pulled out some napkins. He went to hand them to her when he noticed her scraped hands. It was then his eyes wandered to her bare knees poking out from the slit of her dress and saw her knees were also scraped. Serena quickly covered her knees her dress.

"I tripped on my heel," she told him.

He nodded and she took the napkins from him and used one to dab her eyes. He put the car in drive and sped off. "What's your address?"

"134 Hollow Tree Lane."

"Ok, yeah, I know where that is."

The awkward silence that followed between the two was deafening. She could feel her eyes wander off to the side to glance at Steve but retreated the moment he looked at her. Steve cleared his throat. "Mind if I put on some music?" he asked. She shook her head. He turned on the radio and settled for the station that had Yes' "Owner of a Lonely Heart" playing.

"So...Serena, can I ask you something?" Steve asked glancing at her. She nodded. "Why do you hang around those two?"

She shrugged. "They seemed nice at first. Besides, it's high school. If you walk around alone or you're not part of a group, people treat you differently."

Steve chuckled. "You're new this year, right?"

"Yup."

"And I assume you're a senior since you're in my English class?"

"You're correct."

He shook his head. "That's gotta suck. Starting over during your senior year of high school."

She chuckled. "No, it's not exactly an ideal situation."

"What brings you to Hawkins?"

"My mom grew up here."

"So that's it? She just up and decided to move back?"

Serena swallowed hard. "It's complicated."

Steve looked over at her, his eyes softening. "You wanna talk about it?"

Part of her wanted to say "yes". Part of her wanted to go off on a tangent about the whole situation and how it kept her up at night.

Instead, she said, "I'd rather not, but I appreciate the offer."

She couldn't help but notice how slightly distracted Steve was. As if he was trying to forget something of his own. She remembered watching Nancy yelling at him at the party and seeing the confusion in his eyes as if he didn't know how to process what was going on.

"If you don't mind me asking," she began as she tucked her hair behind her ear, "Where's Nancy?"

The mention of her name made Steve purse his lips back as he exhaled calmly. "She's still at the party. I think she and Jonathan are hanging out."

"So why'd you leave?"

He shrugged. "Wasn't in the party mood."

Serena nodded and took the slight bitterness in his tone as a clue that she shouldn't question him about Nancy any further. As their conversation died, "Owner of a Lonely Heart" ended and the disc jockey on the radio followed suit.

"Now for the lovers who fixed their lonely hearts, here's Foreigner with 'Waiting for a Girl Like You'."

Steve groaned. Serena scrunched her nose. "What?"

He waved his hand. "It's nothing. It's just..." He drew a long sigh. "...This song."

Serena nodded understandingly. "It was your guys' song, wasn't it?"

Steve, taken a back, opened his mouth to protest until he gave up and just responded with a, "Yeah. Yeah, it was."

With that, he changed the station to another one. As "Wake Me Up Before You Go Go" faded out, the radio DJ's voice fell over it.

"And before we go go to commercial, here's Ann Wilson of Heart with Mike Reno from Loverboy. The love theme of Footloose... 'Almost Paradise'. Playing right now on 106.5."

The silence in the car turned into awkward tension. Serena had no doubt in her mind that a love song was the last thing Steve needed to hear. This was confirmed when she heard him grumbled "Oh great" under his breath.

How many songs did they have? she thought to herself.

"This one too?"

He let out an "Hm Hm."

"If it makes you feel any better, my prom date danced to this song with another girl last year while I sat on the bleachers and watched."

Steve looked to her and made a face. "Seriously?" She nodded but Steve wasn't convinced. "He took you to prom and then didn't dance with you?"

"Well he danced with me to one song but he knew I wanted one slow dance with him and I wanted it to be to this song. Then, it comes on and I go to find him and there he was dancing with someone else."

"How long did you guys date for?"

"We didn't. We were just really good friends. I really liked him though and well...clearly that wasn't reciprocated."

Steve reached over to change the radio. "Hey, you don't have to-" she said reaching down to stop him from touching the dial. Instead, she put her hand over his and accidentally held it for a few seconds before pulling back quickly. Her mouth hung open in shock as her eyes met Steve's. "I...I am so sorry. I didn't mean...I was just..."

Steve's lips curved into a smile as he burst into laughter. Serena could feel her cheeks get hot. Not only did she accidentally make a pass at him, he was laughing at her for it. She wanted to open the car door and run out. Luckily he was turning onto her street so she would only have to endure this embarrassment for a minute longer.

"If you wanted to hold my hand you should've just said so," he joked. "No wonder you were so curious about my relationship."

Those words ripped into her. She unbuckled her seat belt which was enough to get his attention. His laughter died down. He turned to find tears falling down her face. "Oh shit. I'm sorry."

"Pull over."

"I was really only joking."

"Pull the goddamn car over!"

He slammed on the break as she got out of the car, slamming the door behind her. "Serena, wait-."

She turned to him. "Maybe if you were less of an asshole, you would still have a fucking girlfriend."

With that, she stormed down the street and into her house. She looked out the window to double check that he didn't follow her home. Instead she saw his car drive by her house and continue on down the road. She sighed and ran her hands through her hair. On her way to her bedroom, her mind compiled a list of ways she could get out of going to school tomorrow and avoid running into Steve Harrington.

2. Two

Serena awoke the next morning to the unholy sound of her alarm clock. She reached her hand over to turn it off and snuggled back into bed. The sound of something jingling opened her eyes again and she watched as her Norwich terrier, Dodger, jumped on her bed. The dog came close to her face, his nose sniffing her before giving her kisses.

"Dodger no," she groaned. "I don't wanna get up."

The dog whimpered and pawed at her nose. Serena curled her arm around the dog and began stroking the top of his head with her fingers. This had been her morning routine since she and her mom first moved to Hawkins. Dodger would be by her side from the time she woke up, greeted her when she came home from school, and hung out with her until she fell asleep. For the first few nights, he would sleep with her as she cried herself to sleep but when she stopped doing that he'd stopped staying in her room overnight. Dodger was her lifeline during the move and her transition to Hawkins.

There was a knock on her door before it opened and her mother peeked her head out. "Morning sunshine," she greeted with a big smile. "Did you have a good time last night?"

Last night. The very thought of it made Serena want to gag but for her mom's sake, she smiled and nodded. "Yep."

"Did people say anything about your costume?"

"I got a couple compliments here and there." No one said a damn thing to her all night.

"What time did you get home last night?"

"One in the morning. I woke you up to tell you I was home, remember?"

Her mother laughed. "Oh, that's right. I think I might've been half

asleep. Anyway, did Kate drop you off?"

"She got sick during the party so Luke took her home."

"So she got drunk and left you at the party?"

"Yeah but it's ok. I got a ride home from a friend from class."

"That's good." Her mother paused. "Did you drink?"

"Just one."

Her mother nodded. Drinking was something her mother didn't have an issue with her doing as long as she was responsible and didn't drive. "I have to head out. Morning pitch meeting with some of the reporters. I'll see you later tonight?"

"Sounds like a plan."

Her mother closed the door and just as Serena went to get out of bed, she poked her head out the door again. "I forgot to ask you, did your father ever call to congratulate you on your early acceptance?"

"Nope," she replied, popping the "p".

Her mother sighed. "I'm gonna kill him."

"Don't bother unless you know how to murder someone over voicemail."

With that, Serena pulled the covers off of her and walked past her mother to go to the bathroom. Just as she was about to step in, her mother said, "You know, I'm really proud of you, right?"

Serena gave her mom a small but meaningful smile. "I know. That's all that matters."

"And I told all my reporters yesterday and they're over moon. I also told Joyce and she was so happy. She said when you get a chance to stop by the convenience store. She wants to congratulate you herself."

Joyce Byers was one of the select few people in Hawkins whom Serena had no issue with. When she and her mother moved back, Joyce (who had been her mother's best friend since childhood) made Serena's mom's transition back to Hawkins easier on her. She came over every night during their first week to chat with Serena's mom about the divorce. Joyce was one of the only few people who got what Serena's mother was going through as she was divorced as well. In fact, during Joyce's own divorce, Serena's dad traveled to Hawkins and was Joyce's lawyer during the custody battle for her sons, Jonathan and Will.

Serena smiled. "Will do."

"Alright, so now I actually gotta go but I'll see you tonight, ok?"

"I'll see you then."

Her mother kissed the top of her head before heading down the stairs. Serena sighed and looked in the mirror. She wasn't ready to face anyone today -not Alice or Kate or Steve. Then it hit her. She had classes with Alice and Kate in her first and second period classes and Steve in her fourth. After fourth was her lunch period. She could just go into school during her lunch period and then get through fifth and sixth period classes and then go home since her seventh period class was her free period. She could grab some breakfast at the diner and then drive around for a bit and then go to school. She knew how to copy her mother's handwriting so she could just conjure up a fake excuse note. Something along the lines of she had to stay at home and wait for the repairman.

Dodger's bark took her out of her trance. She looked down at the dog and grinned. She then ran back into her room, grabbed a piece of paper and a pen and started writing.

To Whom it May Concern,

Please excuse my daughter, Serena Novak, from her tardiness this morning as our dog, Dodger, had to make an emergency visit to the vet and I was unable to take him at the time.

Sincerely yours,

Jacqueline Morris

Dodger whimpered from outside the room. Serena made a face at her four-legged friend.

"It's nothing personal," she told the dog.

Serena took a seat at the booth in the back corner of the diner. A waitress appeared and filled the glass on the table with water.

"Can I get you something to start with?" she asked.

"A coffee with half and half would be great thanks."

The waitress left and Serena reached into her school bag and pulled out her copy of "Jane Eyre". Her fingers scanned the pages until she found the page she last left off on. As her eyes scanned the pages, she found herself in a content and relaxed state. For a moment she'd forgotten about Hawkins, about last night, about her father, and let Charlotte Bronte's words take her away.

"Serena?"

The gruff voice startled her from her trance. She looked up to find Officer Jim Hopper standing beside her. She swallowed hard as she lowered the book to the table. Hopper was another one of her mother's closest friends since high school. He helped them move into their house and helped her mother and her reporters out with news pieces like the ongoing destruction of the pumpkin patch the days leading up to Halloween.

She sighed and put her book face down on the table. It didn't matter if she told him the truth or showed him the fake note - he was gonna tell her mother anyway. She might as well let him have it.

"Ok, I can explain," she began.

Hopper held out his hand and shook his head. "Don't." He slid on the other side of the booth. "It's ok. I get it."

She cocked her head to the side, but kept her cool. "You do?"

He sighed as he slid into the seat across from her. "I know this whole, you know, your parents splitting up and starting over at a new school...I know this hasn't been easy on you. "

Her eyes widened as the opportunity to another way out had presented itself to her. She pursed her lips tightly and nodded her head.

"Your mom told me you got an early acceptance at Northwestern. Congratulations. That's impressive."

Serena nodded, pursing her lips back. "Thanks" was all she could say.

Hopper leaned back into the booth. "You know your dad's proud of you, right?"

She opened her mouth to make a smart remark but decided to give him the benefit of doubt. Her mother told her how Hopper was once the father to a little girl who passed away of cancer. As far as Serena had been concerned, his grief and sympathy for Serena's situation coincided into an attempt to be some sort of fatherly figure. In truth Serena, absentee father or not, would've happily put Hopper in place if she didn't feel bad for what happened to his kid. So, instead, Serena replied with, "I like to think so."

Hopper gave a small smile. An uncomfortable silence followed as Serena's eyes shifted down to her cup of coffee when Hopper broke the silence. "I don't think Northwestern will take too kindly to you skipping classes and I don't think your mom would like it either."

With that, Hopper pulled out a pad and pen and started writing. "When you're done your breakfast, give this note to the front office when you decide to get to school. Tell them you had car issues and I helped you take care of it."

He ripped the piece of paper and handed it to her. "No more skipping, ok?"

Serena half-smiled. "Sounds good. Thanks."

Hopper then got up from the booth and walked out of the diner. Serena looked at the note and then out the window. She drew a long

sigh and made a mental note to never leave her house the next time she decided to skip.

I was in search of a good time

Just running my game

Love was the furthest

Furthest from my mind

Caribbean queen

Now we're sharing the same dream-.

Serena turned off the car and grabbed her backpack from the passenger seat. She swung the strap onto her shoulder as she slid out of the car. For the most part, the lot was empty as it was the middle of third period. As she went to lock her car, she quickly glanced across the school's track field when she noticed two familiar figures standing in the alleyway near the gym. Curious, she moved closer when she noticed it was Steve and Nancy. From where she was standing, it looked as though Nancy was trying to talk to Steve, but Steve wasn't having it. As she talked to him, he stood there, his arms folded across his chest. He then lowered his head and walked back into the gym.

While she wasn't entirely sure of what exactly was said in their conversation, she was positive that she had just watched Steve and Nancy break up.

Fuck, she thought.

The pang in her chest was difficult to ignore. She felt bad for Nancy and, despite last night, she felt bad for Steve. While she had sympathy, she'd hoped this meant Steve would be too distracted to try to talk to her during English.

She lowered her gaze and made her way to the school's entrance. She stopped by the front office to give the receptionist the note Hopper

had written. Without any question or comment, she was given an excuse slip and sent on her way.

Much to her chagrin, the bell to end third period rang as she arrived at her locker. The once quiet hallways were now filled with other students passing by, talking and laughing loudly. As Serena opened her locker to grab her English book, Kate and Alice appeared.

"There you are!" Alice chirped. "God last night was so crazy, right?"

"How long were guys there til'?" Kate asked.

"Well I went home with the new guy. You know, Billy? Like we left around 3 am." Alice's eyes turned to Serena and she smirked. "This loser, however, went home too early."

Kate pouted and turned to Serena. "Is that true?"

Serena slammed her locker door. "Yup. Sure is Kate. In fact, I walked home in the freezing cold. Not that either of you care because it's your world and we're all just living it."

As she went to leave, Alice grabbed her by the wrist. "If you wanna have friends who will actually invite you to places, I suggest watching your tone."

Serena wriggled her wrist from Alice's embrace. "Bite me, bitch."

With that Serena turned her back and kept on walking. She then got to her desk in her English class and pulled out "Jane Eyre" once again. In-between reading, she occasionally glanced up at the door to see if he would even bother showing up. At one point, she'd looked up found Steve looking at her from the doorway. She shifted her eyes and cursed under her breath.

She felt something hit her arm. She looked down to find a piece of paper crumbled into a ball. She reached down and picked it up before glaring at Steve.

"Really?" she mouthed.

"Just open it," he mouthed back.

Her eyes rolled as she unfolded the paper ball.

I'm sorry for last night.

Serena sighed and grabbed her pen.

It's fine. Just forget about it.

She crumbled the paper back into a ball and chucked it at Steve's arm. Steve jumped and made a face at her when a male's voice cut into the room.

"Good day kids," the male said as he rolled in a cart with a television on it. "Your teacher called in sick so we're just going to watch a video today."

Serena sighed in relief as she reached for her book. Just as she sat up, the crumbled ball hit her forearm. She whipped her head to Steve who motioned for her to pick up the ball.

Son of a bitch, she thought to herself. She picked up the ball and opened it.

Do you forgive me enough to ditch class with me?

She turned to him as the lights went out. "Why?" she mouthed at him.

Steve leaned over the arm of his chair. "I just want to talk to you."

"About what?"

"Please."

His eyes pleaded with her. She exhaled. Maybe he really did need someone to talk to. She wished she hadn't seen him break up with Nancy. She looked over to see the sub sitting in the chair with his

head leaning back and his mouth wide open. Her eyes also scanned the room to find other students napping or putting their heads down.

She looked back at Steve and leaned close to him. "Follow me and don't make a sound," she instructed in a hushed tone.

He nodded. Serena got up from her desk, slowly and quietly. She grabbed her purse and hurried to the door, Steve following close behind. He closed the door behind him. He motioned for her to follow him. He led her down the hall and into the stairwell where they walked out the back door.

"Ok," she sighed as she folded her arms across her chest. "What do you want?"

He shoved his hands in his pockets. "Nancy and I broke up."

Serena's lips pursed tightly. Even though she knew, hearing him say it aloud still managed to break her heart a bit. But she wasn't gonna go soft on him that easily. "I'm sorry to hear that."

"I'm the one who did the breaking."

She blinked. "O...ok? I don't necessarily think it matters who did the breaking up."

"She didn't say she loved me."

Serena's mouth hung open as she tried to find the right response. It wasn't much help that his eyes were starting to water and he began pacing back and fourth.

"I think she loves Jonathan," he blurted out.

Her eyebrows furrowed. "Jonathan who?"

"Jonathan Byers."

Without missing a beat, Serena burst into laughter. Steve stopped pacing to shoot her a glare. "What?" he snapped. "What's so funny?"

She wiped her eyes as her laughter died down. "Sorry, it's just...it's hard to imagine Jonathan having any feelings for anyone. I mean every time I see that kid he's just so stone faced. He barely gives me a smile when he sees me."

He raised his eyebrows. "You know him?"

"Our moms are good friends. I wouldn't say I'm friends with him but we get along for the most part."

"And you haven't seen him with Nancy? Like in the halls or any place like that?"

She shook her head. "Look, I think you should ditch the rest of your classes and just go home. Drink some water. Maybe take a nap. Lay low."

But Steve wasn't having it. "Ditch with me."

She scoffed. "I'm not...I already skipped first and second period."

"So?" he shrugged. "What? You have a quiz or test or something?"

"No but-."

"Then ditch with me."

She threw her hands up in the air. "Why me? Why does it have to be me?"

"Because I don't have anyone else I can talk to." His voice broke toward the end of his sentence. "And I actually liked talking to you last night. Besides, you look like you could use an actual friend here - not people you hang out with and pretend to like."

Serena put her hands on her hips. "Why would I want to be friends with you? You accused me of hitting on you."

"First of all, I didn't accuse you. I was just messing with you and I took it too far. Second, I said I was sorry and you said you forgave me. Third, because I know you enjoyed talking to me too."

She couldn't deny that either. It was nice to talk to someone who felt so open with her and allowed her the chance to be herself and to be comfortable. Even if he acted like an ass at the end, before that she'd thought of him as a really nice guy. Maybe that guy was still somewhere in there.

She ran a hand through her hair. "How good are you at ditching school?"

Steve's face lit up. "Grab whatever you need and meet me back out here in five."

He went to go inside when he pulled back and looked at her. He smiled warmly. "Thanks."

Serena walked past him, patting him on the shoulder as she made her way inside. Hopefully she wouldn't regret this.

3. Three

The two settled on going to Steve's house considering his parents were out of town. That and there was no way Serena was risking the possibility of her mom coming home early. The last thing she needed was to be interrogated as to why there was a boy in the house.

It didn't come as a surprise to her that Steve lived in a wealthy neighborhood. He drove a BMW which in Hawkins, Indiana is the ultimate sign of wealth. At least that's how she viewed it.

She followed him all the way to the end of the street and scrunched her eyebrows his car turned into the only house that wasn't colonial or victorian style. It was lodge-like and grey, standing out from the repeated yellows, whites, and brown houses in the neighborhood. It was a two story with creamy white windows and a red door.

She pulled into the long driveway and parked behind him. Her eyes stayed fixated on the house as she stepped out and closed the car door. She didn't realize how obvious my fascination had been until Steve remarked, "It's just a house. Some of the ones in the neighborhood you're in are just as nice."

"I wouldn't take you as someone who lived in a grey in a house," she replied.

His eyebrow raised. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"For someone so social and preppy like yourself...I don't know. I would've thought you lived in something with a brighter exterior. Like a yellow or white house."

"That's a little judgmental, don't you think?"

She shrugged. He put his hands on his hips. "You're weird, you know that?"

"And yet you begged me to ditch school with you."

Steve tilted his head to the side, softly laughing. Serena suddenly felt herself smiling back at him and immediately tried to hide it.

He motioned his head toward the door. She followed him from behind as he opened the door and let her inside first.

The inside of the Harrington house was cozy but not crowded with furniture. For the most part, there was furniture a couple pieces of artwork hanging on the wall. The lack of over the top decorations made the house more spacious than it seemed to be on the outside.

"Make yourself at home," Steve said walking towards the kitchen. "Can I get you something to drink? Water? Coke? Wine? Vodka? Scotch?"

Hey rolled her eyes. "I'll take a coke, thank you."

Steve pulled out two Coke cans from the fridge. He tossed one to Serena which she caught in her hand. She followed him to the living room and onto the couch. He plopped down and pat the empty spot beside him. Serena took off her ankle boots before curling up on the couch.

"Ok, you have me in your house," Serena sighed, as she opened the soda can. "What is it you want to talk to me about?"

Steve took a long sip of coke and eyed her. "Tell me about yourself."

She scoffed playfully. "Because that's so interesting."

"It is." He smiled at her. "I've known everyone in my graduating class since kindergarten. Suddenly you show up out of nowhere and you're...like this mysterious person who just comes in, takes her seat, and just keeps to herself."

Serena smirked. "Seems like you got me figured out so I don't have to tell you anything."

Steve made a face. "But I don't though. Every time I see you keeping to yourself, you become more and more fascinating."

Her mouth hung open as she processed what Steve was telling her. Sure, when he picked her up he recognized her, but the idea her existence fascinated him was hard to believe considering he was so madly in love with Nancy.

“Are you...are you trying to say you’ve been watching me?” she questioned.

His eyes widened. “Not like that, no. But you’re not that hard to notice either.”

A warmth in her chest arose as her heartbeat picked up. The only thing she could do was just smile and chuckle as she tried to keep it together and attempt to not read too much into it.

“I...thank you?” was all she could mutter out.

Steve smiled. “So here did you live before you came to Hawkins?”

The knots in her stomach tightened despite her attempts to shake it off. “Aurora, Illinois. Born and raised.”

He raised an eyebrow. “So why Hawkins? I remember you telling me your mom grew up here but...”

There it was. She’d managed to avoid the first time he brought it up but considering how opened he’d been to her about his relationship with Nancy, she figured she could at least give him a sliver. She ran a hand through her hair, her nervous tick kicking in.

“My parents divorced,” she answered.

His eyes lowered as he nodded understandingly. “Sorry to hear that. That’s gotta be rough to deal with.”

She snorted. “It’s not ideal but it is what it is. Certainly nothing I can about it.”

“Doesn’t mean it hurts any less.”

She eyed him as her finger gently tapped the coke can. “Don’t...don’t tell anyone. Please?”

He smiled. “Who would I tell?”

“You tell me, *King Steve*.”

It was his turn to roll his eyes in disgust. Serena cocked her head back in response. "What?" she laughed.

"That nickname...so stupid," he grumbled shaking his head. "I mean there was a time when it was cool to be called that, but now it's just used as a form of mockery against me."

She rested her cheek on to the palm of her hand, her elbow propped up on top of the couch pillows. "And how did King Steve fall from his throne?"

"Who says I did?" he countered defensively.

Her face scrunched. "You really want me to answer that?"

Steve sighed and threw his hands up. "Before Nancy, I wasn't serious about any of the other girls I'd been with. I didn't like the idea of being tied down to one person because what was the fun in that?" He paused. "Then I met Nancy and...I don't know. She wasn't easy like the other girls and she seemed to hold her own. I actually felt something when I was with her."

He paused, and tapped his fingers on the Coke can. "I went to her house to apologize for being an ass and then I saw Jonathan in her room. I thought she cheated so I did what I thought I knew best, I humiliated her."

"What'd you do?" Serena asked.

He bit his bottom lip. "I...you know the Hawk downtown?" She nodded. "In short, I spray painted on the marquee that Nancy was a slut. Anyway, she saw it and confronted me about it. She told me it wasn't true and initially I didn't believe her until I saw her and then Jonathan beat the shit out of me."

"As you deserved," she commented with a nod. "Go on."

He chuckled. "Later that day I was hanging with some friends and Nancy's face kept coming into my mind. I couldn't shake the memory of her crying in front of me and I just felt like I had made a huge mistake. My friends kept talking shit about her so I told them to go fuck themselves and got my ass beaten even more. I cleaned the

marquee and went to Nancy's house and apologized to her and Jonathan. We worked it out and everything seemed to be going ok."

Steve's smile faltered. He cleared his throat. "I gave so much of myself to Nancy. I was there for her when her best friend died. No matter what I did, she couldn't shake it." He looked at Serena.

Serena nodded understandingly. Steve continued. "Nancy's grief came and went and we were good whenever she wasn't upset, but every time she was upset she'd tell me I didn't understand and would run off to Jonathan. I told myself it didn't mean anything. That they were just friends, but every time I saw them I just felt like I was lying to myself. Last month marked a year since her friend died and she just got worse. Last night, she got hammered and told me it was our fault her friend died and that she was tired of me pretending like it didn't matter. That's when she told me she didn't love me anymore and then proceeded to throw up on my shoes. At that point, I'd had enough. I gave her a chance to prove me wrong this morning but she wouldn't tell me she loved me."

He drew a long sigh. "And that's how Steve got dethroned - giving it up to be with someone who changed their mind. Just sucks because... because I still care, you know?"

In the silence that followed, Serena processed his explanation. Steve looked off into the distance before shifting his gaze to Serena and waited for her reaction.

Her eyes finally met his. "Two things. First, let me just say this: popularity in high school means nothing. Sure, it means for four years you can do whatever the fuck you want and it means people like you, but it doesn't carry on once you graduate. After that, you become just like everyone else and no one cares about who you are what you did. Your reign ended earlier than most. So what? At least now you can be a real person and avoid the whole 'guy-stuck-in-his-high-school-glory-days' stereotype."

Steve's eyes widened as he tried to muster a response. "O...ok then. What's the second thing?"

"I can see how much you do love Nancy and I'm willing to help you

get her back if you want.”

He sat up. “You would do that?”

“On one condition.” She pursed her lips back and scolded herself for the words that were about to come out of her mouth. “You told me earlier I could use some real friends and you...you may have been right about that. That said-.”

She stopped when she saw the smug smile on his face. “Steve, c’mon.”

He put his hand out. “I’m sorry. Look, I know it pains you to say it so I won’t make you say it. Not that you had to because it would be my honor hanging out with you. Not out of pity for your parents being divorced and not because you’re helping me out - but because you’re actually a pretty cool person.”

She sighed. Sure, she was grateful he didn’t make her say it but did he have to word it in a way that would make her feel so giddy inside? “Thank you.” She got up from the couch. “Let’s seal this deal with a round of shots. Your choice of alcohol.”

Steve got up from the couch excitedly and ran into the kitchen. Serena watched as he pulled two shot glasses from the cabinet and a bottle of whiskey. He poured the whiskey into each shot glass and brought the two glasses carefully back into the living room. He gave one to Serena.

“One last thing,” she said holding onto his arm. “I mean it when I say ‘friend’. I’m not your rebound or your fuck buddy or whatever. Just a friend. Got it?”

“Got it,” he replied smiling.

The two clinked the glasses before throwing their heads back and downing the entire thing. The stinging aftertaste was enough to make Serena cough and Steve’s nostrils flare.

“No turning back now,” Steve rasped.

Serena laughed and cleared her throat. Then, for the first time since

she'd moved to Hawkins, she genuinely smiled.